Advice to Apprentices,

And other

Young Perſons,

To beware of

Evil Company and Evil Courſes:

And particularly of

THEFT.

By *William Smythies* Curate of St. *Giles Cripplegate.*

Licenſed and Entred according to Order.

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ADVICE
TO
YOUNG PERSO[illegible]

THE fearful Calamities which vitious young Persons bring upon themselves and others, by their Debaucheries; their deplorable Condition whilst they live, and when they dye, (which I have frequently, with a sorrowful Heart, observed) is the Occasion of this, and may be of some other such Little and Cheap Publications.

It is by the Wickedness and Ungodliness of young Persons, that the Devil *exalts his Kingdom* in the World, and makes it to be a Plantation or Nursery for himself, in which *Sin* and *Vice* shall grow, and *Virtue* and *Goodness* be deprest. It is by *their* casting off the Fear of God, that he hopes to establish his Throne, from Generation to Generation; well knowing, that it is the best Security which he can have, that their Posterity (like their Parents) will make haste to become his Subjects and Servants. Nothing Ruines the World, and brings so much Misery into it, as the Miscarriages of those that are young. No Man can undertake to tell the Mischief which *One* of that Age may bring upon himself and others, before he dyes: Nor can the young Man himself foretell it. There are many that are guilty of notorious Outrages, and most destructive Courses; of which, if they had been told when they were young, they would have said to such a Prophet as *Ha-*

[illegible] did; [illegible] Dog, that I should do this thing? Who can tell [illegible] Folly and Wickedness *he* will run, who enters [illegible] *the destroyer*, when he should be remembr[illegible]?

It were [illegible] happy thing if young Persons would be pr[illegible] by the Commands of God, who still [illegible] its of our Years, though not of [illegible] ces of Scripture which sig- [illegible] of God, concerning early [illegible] most part, wholly lost. [illegible] enough; and afterwards [illegible] concern'd in them.

Thus do those who dare not disobey the Commands of their Parents or Masters, for fear of present Punishment, make light of disobeying the great God, although eternal Punishment be the consequence of it.

It were likewise very Happy, if the Advantages of a pious and virtuous Life would prevail with young Persons. Nothing is more acknowledged (and yet less practiced) than that which the Prophet saith, *Lam.* 3. 27. *It is good for a Man that he bear the yoke in his Youth.* No Man begins to live, till he begins to live well. The Prodigal in the Parable was dead whilst he lived a *riotous* life: *This my Son was dead*, &c. No man begins to be Happy, till he begins to be Religious, because he knows that he is wrong and out of the *way of Peace*. There is continued Fear and Perplexity of mind upon every serious thought; and no man can deny but there is just cause for it. All Sinners acknowledge, in the time of their Distress and real sensibility of their condition, that they never enjoyed any true Pleasure or Satisfaction, because *their minds were not subject to the Law of God*: but disobedient to it: And therefore those that often saw their merry Faces, did not see how *sorrowful their Hearts were in the midst of mirth*; nor how many gripes they had in their minds, to think of their condition. *The*

young

For mr John Cooper
In Wolverhampton
[illegible]

young man that fears God, and lives a sober and a godly life, hath more pleasure in one day, than the vitious and disobedient can have in the longest Age.

But this shall not be my present subject, though it would be a very pleasant one; because the Perverse and Stubborn Nature of Man is not so apt to be drawn as driven to that which is good: And the consideration of present Miseries in this life, which are the Objects of sence, are more apt to prevail, than the eternal Miseries of the life to come, which are the Objects of Faith. I shall therefore consider some of the intolerable Miseries which young Persons bring upon themselves, which they little foresee, when they begin to allow themselves in the neglect of their Duties to God and men.

We live in a City where there is abundance of Riches, but a great many Snares. If the minds of young Persons be well disposed that come hither, they may become *great* as well as *good*, from the smallest, or rather no beginning. It were endless to give an account of the great Estates with which poor *Orphans*, *Hospital-boys*, *Beggar-boys*, *Foundlings*, and such like, have been blessed in this City, and the Good that they have done in the World, whose minds have been inclined to that which is good and honest. But on the other hand, where inclinations prevail to that which is evil, there are innumerable Temptations ready to hurry young Men and Women to several sorts of destructive Wickedness. That which *I* shall only mention at present is *Theft*; a Sin which hath alwaies been in the World, but *I* have some reason to say, that it abounds more in this than many are aware of: Complaints may be made in the words of the Prophet *Hosea*, *c.* 7. *v.* 1. *The Thief cometh within, and troops of Robbers spoyl without.* I do not intend to speak of *Theft* at large, (all *Deceit* being a breach of the Eighth Commandment) but of that which is commonly called so;

so. That I may do what in me lies to suppress this Evil, I will endeavour to shew,

1. What this Sin is in its own nature.
2. The evil Concomitants of it.
3. The fatal Consequences of it. And,
4. Give some Advice to young Persons for the prevention of it.

I. What this Sin is in it self. A most hateful Wickedness, which every one is asham'd to own, much more to justifie. No man that robs another, offers so great violence to *him* as he offers to himself: He breaks through the most forcible Convictions of his own mind, that Guard which God hath set upon the Soul of Man, to keep it from Destruction. That every one is to have his own, and that it ought not to be taken from him, is one of the first impressions on our minds, when we are little Children. To take away the Right of another, either secretly or openly, either by Theft or Robbery, (for I shall speak of them promiscuously) is so low and so base a thing, that though the Devil can prevail with many wicked men so far as to be guilty of it, in hope of concealment, yet he cannot harden any so, as not to be confounded when they are discovered; *The Thief is ashamed when he is found*, *Jer.* 2. 26. There needs no Bible to shew him his Sin; the most savage Heathen in the World can tell him, That it is to be abandon'd and abhorr'd; and the Thief knows, that he is worse than that Heathen. *Turks* and *Infidels* have shewed the greatest Severities against this Sin. History tells us of men that have been put to death for stealing an Apple, or a Bunch of Grapes, or some such contemptible thing, probably from this Principle, That he who is broke loose from his Conscience, to steal that which is of small, may soon come to take away that which is of great account. It was not, that the Life of a Man was not valued by them; for they were no less severe to a false Accuser. We read of

of a Commander, to whom a Woman complain'd, That one of his Souldiers had stolen and eaten some of her Milk: The Souldier thereupon was put to death, and his Stomach ript open, that if the Milk were not there, the Woman might suffer death for her false Accusation; if it were, she should have satisfaction for it, besides the Life of the Offender, and so it proved. The Thief is one that un-mans himself, that he may become a hated Beast of Prey. Some say, that the reason why God forbad his People *Israel* eating Fowls of Prey, *Levit.* 11. 13, &c. was, that they might not prey upon one another. More of the baseness of this Sin will necessarily follow under other heads.

II. Consider the evil Concomitants of *Theft*. As a Man, so a Sin is commonly known by its Companions. The hainousness of this Sin may be known by those that keep it company. I will not undertake to mention all of them. When men break loose from the first Principles of common Honesty, it may well be expected, that the Devil should so far prevail with them, as to stick at nothing that is wicked. I will therefore only mention some of them.

1. *Lying*. This is so well known, that it is become a Proverb, *He that will steal will lye*: The shame of that calls to this to shelter and protect it. A Lyar is abominable to God, who hath declared, that Hell shall be his Portion. I may mention one place amongst many, because there is a particular Note in it of God's displeasure against that Sin, *Rev.* 12. 8. *The fearful* (*i. e.* those that deny their Religion, for fear of Persecution) *and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all lyars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.* *All Lyars*, which seems to intimate, that though some of the other sinners should escape, yet the Lyar shall not. Or rather it may have relation to the several sorts of Lyars that are in the world;

of which it is not to my present purpose to give an Account: Most certainly it denotes to us, that the God of Truth hates, and will severely punish Lyars.

It is a Sin that is abominable to men too, for it is the bane of all Traffique, Converse and Society. It is destructive of the very end of Speech: For to what purpose should men speak to one another, if what they say cannot be believ'd? But to the Thief, Lying is a thing in course of which his hardened Conscience takes little notice: I question whether he ever thinks to ask God forgiveness for it, or whether he thinks he shall need to do it.

2. *Blood-shedding.* The Prophet *Nahum* charges these three upon *Nineveh*, *c.* 3. *v.* 1. *Wo to the bloody City, it is full of Lyes and Robbery.* I wish there were not cause for such a denunciation against our City.

Thieves are very barbarous and inhumane: The Life of a man signifies little or nothing to them, if he offers to keep that which is his own from these men of Cruelty; of which every year produces instances. The man (in the Parable, *Luk.* 10.) might expect pity from the Passengers; but there is no mention of any that was to be expected from the Thieves: *They stripped him, they wounded him, and they left him half dead.* There is a Cruelty which they are guilty of, which is a kind of Murder by consequence; and that is their robbing the poor and needy. The Son of *Syrach* saith, *Eccles.* 34. 22. *He that taketh away his Neighbour's living, slayeth him: and he that defraudeth the Labourer of his hire, is a blood-shedder.* The poor man who hath gotten a little Mony to buy Bread for his Family, is as soon way-laid and robb'd as he that hath abundance. The Labourer, that carries home that which he *earnes with the sweat of his Brow*, shall lose it in the time of his *sweet sleep*, if the *Thief can break in and steal it.* He is so far from observing that Gospel-Precept, *Eph.* 4. 2. *Let him that stole, steal no more: but let him labour, working,*

ing with his hands, &c. That he is resolved not only to continue stealing, but to steal from him who doth *labour with his hands*. This is such a Cruelty, as may fitly come under this head of *Murder*; for it is to take away the Bread of the needy.

3. *Uncleanness*. Adultery and Fornication are the common sins which Thieves are guilty of. I should not have mentioned this, nor indeed have thought of it, if I had not very good ground for it, from the acknowledgment of condemned Malefactors. They are a lewd Society of Men and Women, who having broke loose from Honesty, do not at all value Chastity. That only which they are afraid of, is the poysoning of one anothers Bodies; yet this, it seems, is very common too (which by the way might be a good Argument to all young Men, to beware of those filthy-diseased Creatures, which walk the streets in the night-time, on purpose to entice Men into their dangerous Embraces, robbing their Souls, Bodies and Purses at the same time) When once Men and Women forsake the common Principles of mankind, and become Beasts of prey, it is no wonder if like Beasts they be in common one with another.

4. *Profane Swearing and Cursing*. The Prophet *Zechariah*, *c.* 5. *v.* 3, 4. speaks of the Judgment of God *cutting off the Thief and the Swearer*; Surely then when they both meet in one and the same person, he may well expect to be cut off. We seldome hear of any Highway Robberies, but we hear how desperately the Robbers swear and curse; how they call to God for Damnation; and since he doth not presently send it, they make haste to it by their speed to the Gallows. *Solomon* saith, *Prov.* 29. 24. *Whoso is Partner with a Thief, hateth his own Soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not*. By *Cursing* we may understand, as many do, those blasphemous Speeches which are wont to come out of the mouths of Thieves. And if he that is Partner with

a Thief, his Soul be in such Danger, in what Danger is the Soul of the Thief himself? The great Evil of the Sin of *prophane Swearing*, may be the subject of another Tract. In the mean while, it may be enough to say, that it is such an impudent daring of the Almighty, that we may wonder how he that is guilty of it, can ever expect to be in the favour of that God. These are such Concomitants of Theft, as may make all young persons, afraid of it, lest they wholly *forsake God, and be forsaken of him.* I proceed to consider,

III. The Consequents of Theft. There should be an end propounded to every action, and every one should consider whether the ensuing disadvantages will not out-weigh all the advantages that can be hoped for. But the Thief must be a man void of Consideration, and one in whom nothing but Desperate Folly and Madness bears sway; for he makes the worst choice of any man living, and in a short time must necessarily conclude, that the miserablest Beggar that is honest, is better than he. He hath little reason to be Proud, or to rejoyce in his Undertaking; for it is that which many Beggars refuse, as being too base and vile. I shall consider the Consequences of it in three respects.

1. It brings intolerable Pain and Uneasiness to the Mind. There have been many instances, which shew that the Conscience of a Thief is not so fast asleep as many honest men that are robbed by him; Nor can they bind that so fast from stirring, and crying, [*Thief*] as sometimes they bind those that are awake. The Thief goes up and down the World with a Curse very like to *Cain's*; he is afraid that *every one that meets him should lay hold on him*, in order to the taking away of his Life. The fear and terror of Thieves is excellently described by *Job*, as well as their wicked Trade, *Job* 24 16, 17. *In the dark they dig through houses, which they had marked for themselves in the day-time:*

time: they know not the light. For the morning is to them even as the shadow of Death; if one know them, they are in the terrors of the shadow of death. Their Employment in the day-time is, to find out a House which they may rob in the night: And in robbing another, they rob themselves of their peace and quiet. When the Day comes, they cannot say, that they *care not who knows them:* for if there be but *one* that knows them, they are presently *in the terrors of the shadow of Death*: they are struck with Fear, as a Man whom Death doth suddenly surprize or overshadow. *Theft* is a prodigious folly as well as wickedness; for whatever the stolen Goods are worth, they cannot answer the fear and terror which immediately follows, and is of long continuance. I was (many years since) a Spectator at the Execution of an Old Man, who (as it appear'd too late) suffer'd wrongfully. As he protested his Innocency, relating to that for which he was Condemned, (other Thieves had thrown the stolen Goods under a Shop where he lay asleep) so he confess'd, That when he was a young Man, he stole a Handkerchief from a Hedge, which was a trouble to him all the days of his Life. He added, That he alwaies thought he should be hang'd, because of that Handkerchief. It was a small Theft that he was guilty of; but the trouble of his mind was very great, and the fear of God's Justice a continued Terror.

I shall mention one more amongst many, which I had from a Condemned Malefactor, by which it appears, that the terrors of death do sometimes take hold on Thieves, and will not let them go, though none know them. One of the Gang was on a sudden surpriz'd with a terrible apprehension that he should be taken, tho' he had not heard of any Pursuit or Warrant that was against him: He discovered his fear to this Person, and withal told him, that he knew he should be executed, and that he should, upon his Examination, discover

him and the rest of his Companions. He was desired if he could not otherwise be rid of his Fears, to go beyond the Seas: but he replyed, that he had not power to do it. Hereupon, in a private Consult, they resolved to be his Executioners; and so they were, for having perswaded him on to the Water about midnight they there drown'd him. Thus we see how fear and folly is the consequent of Wickedness.

The Person from whom I had this Account told me that he was the chief Actor in it; and that it had been an unspeakable trouble to him; and the greater, because the poor man begg'd so hard for Mercy, when they threw him out of the Boat. He likewise discovered a Remarkable Passage, which was the consequent of his Murder. He soon heard of the dead Body of a Man wash'd up at *Westminster*; and although he was terribly afraid, that if he saw it, the Corps would bleed, or there would somewhat happen, which would betray him; yet he could not forbear going to see if it were the same Person; but it prov'd to be another. It is impossible that a Thief can think of anything so often as a Jayl and the Gallows, Hell and Destruction. How then can his mind be at ease?

2. Consider the Consequence of *Theft*, in reference to outward Concerns.

1. It is a Sin which makes every man turn *his* Enemy who is guilty of it. I may say of the Thief as the Apostle saith of other Persons, *They please not God, and are contrary to all men.* It is a Sin so abominable, that so far as any are suspected to be guilty of it, they are abhorr'd. The day of their Execution is a joyful day to the World. Thieves are not only hated of good men, but they are such vile Servants of the Devil, that are hated of all their fellow-Servants. Those that are most wicked in other respects, hate a Thief. The World ever cryed out against them. In *Job*'s time, who is suppos'd to have lived before *Moses*, there was crying

after a Thief, *Job* 30. 5. and our Saviour's Expression, *Mark* 14. 48. supposes that Men are alwaies ready with Swords and Staves to take a Thief. They must needs be hated, because men are alwaies afraid of them, left their Shops should be robb'd in the day, and their Pockets pick'd; or, that their Houses should be broken in the night; and therefore there must be Bolts and Bars. Thieves are like the Devil, that go up and down, *seeking whom they may devour.* They are such Plagues to the World, that our Saviour tells us, Heaven is a place of Happiness, because there are none there; *Mat.* 6. 20. *Lay up for your selves Treasures in heaven, where thieves cannot break through and steal.*

Under this head I may consider what a Thief is to all his honest Relations: Such *a shame!* that it is great incivility to speak of him in their company, or so much as to mention his Name, if strangers be present. If he hath a *Father* or *Mother*, Who can find words or courage to express their heart-breaking grief and sorrow? They wish a thousand times that *he* had never been born, nor *themselves* neither. Nothing in this World can afford comfort to them, which bears any proportion to their grief; so that if there were not a God to support, it might well be expected that Distraction or Death should seize upon them. I once saw, at an Assizes, a Thief condemned, who was no sooner taken from the Bar, but his Mother stept up; the poor Woman would fain have spoken to the Judge, and could not; but by the beating and wringing of her Hands, her distracted Countenance, and other Evidences of her insupportable grief, she melted both Judge and Justices and many hundreds more, into Tears. What is there in all the Gains of Wickedness, which can make amends to Parents for that sorrow which they endure, when they consider with what Charge, Care and Paines they preserved a Life, which must be taken away by an Executioner? Little do young Persons think, when they

they take Evil courſes, what a *Grief* they are, or may be to *their Father*, and what *a bitterneſs to her that bare them*, *Prov.* 17. 25.

2. *Theft* is a Sin which hath the moſt manifeſt curſe following it. Thieves of all men, have reaſon to ſay, that *Treaſures of wickedneſs profit nothing*: How many ſoever they ruin, they do not enrich themſelves. 'Tis ſeldome that Felons Goods amount to any thing that is conſiderable, unleſs they have been newly taken. What they get wickedly, they commonly ſpend wickedly and ſpeedily. Doubtleſs it coſts them a great deal of Money in rioting, that they may drown the voice of their Conſciences, and forget how ſorrowful they have made others. They are at great Charge, it may be, in keeping Confederates, and engaging them in their aſſiſtance: Beſides, they are not of ſettled Habitations, but are running up and down, and muſt not value Charge, ſo they can but hope for ſafety and farther opportunities of doing miſchief. Thus they ſpend what they get, and only leave their Cloathes to him that rids the World of them. Their condition is deſcribed, *Job* 24. 18. *He is ſwift as the waters; their portion is accurſed on the earth, and they know not the way of the Vineyards. He is ſwift as the Waters*; he runs like a violent ſtream, being hurried by his fear and danger. *Their portion*, this Clauſe is plural, though the other was not, denoting (ſay ſome) the univerſality of the Curſe. How many ſoever there are of them, and how much ſoever they get, *their Portion* (*i. e.* whatever they have) *is accurſed on the earth. They behold not the way of the Vineyards.* To *behold*, frequently ſignifies to *ſee* with delight: *Vineyards* are places of Profit and Pleaſure; and, I conceive, the meaning is, that they are a curſed Crew, that enjoy no good in the World.

3. I will conſider the Thief, in reference to another World. It may ſeem *ſtrange*, conſidering the Nature and Concomitants of this Sin, that thoſe that are guilty of

of it should not be Atheists; and yet the contrary appears in many of them. A notorious Robber told me, That he never doubted of a God, but hoped by Repentance at last to gain his Favour; and we find the vilest of them as sensible then of a Soul departing, as of a Body dying. And it may seem no less strange, that after they have been so desperately wicked, they should expect forgiveness from God, when they can be so no longer; and yet they discover great confidence of it. But it will appear, that their Case is very desperate, if we consider,

1. When it is that they repent. One would think, that so soon as a Thief comes into Prison, the terrors of his Conscience should lay hold on him, and that he should consider that the Profit or Pleasure of his Sin cannot compensate that miserable confinement, and the shame of appearing at the Bar of Justice, though he should escape with his Life: But he is so hardened in his Wickedness, that it is in vain for a Minister, or any other, to speak to him of the concern of his Soul, whilst he hath any Hope that he shall escape the death of his Body. He will not endure to hear of it so long as there is hopes that he may continue his Wickedness.

It is, it seems, a common practice, if a Minister comes to speak with one whom he knows not, to send another to personate him, that when he is gone, they may make merry at the Relation of what he said, and his disappointment. I had such a Trick put upon me when I went to visit one (at the Request of his Relations) who was executed soon after it. Good Counsel is but the occasion of mockery to many of them, till they are sure they shall be executed, and are within a little of it. They are so desperately wicked, that they will keep their Hand in ure, by stealing in the Prison, if there be opportunity for it. I once visited a sick Prisoner, whose near Relation had sent him a Bottle of Cordial Water, and whilst he arose from the ground

to

to speak to me, his Bottle, upon which he laid his Head was stolen from him. The time of that Man's Repentance was not yet come, and therefore he continued stealing in that place; from whence he might expect shortly to be carried to the place of Execution.

2. Consider what a Thiefs repentance is, when it comes, and when he can stay no longer. He is under a great consternation of mind to think of the wrath of God, and therefore he calls with great vehemency to him to have mercy upon him, all which may be done without any grief or sorrow for the baseness of his sin. Doubtless, his Conscience may tell him at the same time that he is not so sorry for what he hath done, as he is, that the Gallows will hinder him from doing so any longer. He thinks that repentance consists in nothing else, but the confessing of his sin to God, and his begging Mercy and Pardon from him; and if this were all, there were very little difficulty indeed in being saved; a very little seeking would find the Kingdom of Heaven; No man should need to doubt of Salvation, unless he dyed so suddenly, that he could not speak a few words to God, or were at that time depriv'd of his Reason and Understanding: and if he were so, the presumptuous Sinner would make no great matter of it, for he would conclude it to be a very hard thing, that God should destroy a man for ever, because he could not speak to him before he dyed, that he might ask his Pardon, which he all along intended to do when he could offend him no more. By these and such like pitiful Delusions doth the Devil secure to himself the Souls of these poor Creatures, who understand the mystery of iniquity, but will not understand that which is most reasonably and most plainly required of them, in order to their forgiveness and acceptance of God. These two things are of absolute necessity, which they consider not.

1. Every Sinner must have the Grace and holy Spi-

rit of God *to renew his mind*, or else he cannot have the mercy of God to *forgive his Sin*. However, the *fear of God*, and of his displeasure, may be *the beginning of wisdom*, yet it is not the finisher of it; for then a man might be saved, though he never loved God and that *Righteousness* and *Holiness* which is in God: A man might then go to Heaven without any preparation for it; 'tis enough to entitle him to it, that he is afraid of Hell.

When the sinner fearing punishment, not only because of his evil actions, but because of his evil mind, in which he finds an *enmity against the Laws of God*, doth not only implore the mercy of God, but his Grace and Holy Spirit, to change his mind into a hatred of all his former wicked ways, and a delight in all that is good, this makes his condition hopeful, and shews that *the fear of God* was in him *the beginning of wisdom*, (*i. e.*) of Holiness and Goodness; and if this were the case of the worst Thief in the world, it might be hopeful too. But for a Thief to beg mercy from God, is no more an Argument of his Repentance and Amendment, than is his begging favour from the Judge, or his Pardon from the King. There is great difference between the reason of the King's pardoning and of God's. The King pardons from his Princely compassion, in hopes of Amendment; but God doth not pardon, unless he sees amendment by a new Principle in the Heart and Mind of the Sinner: And therefore it is of infinite moment for every guilty Sinner to examine himself whether there be such a new Principle in him.

2. In cases of injury done to Men, there is no mercy to be obtained from God, unless there be restitution of the wrong done, or all that is in the Sinners power to do towards it. The Offender hath no reason to expect that his Prayers should be accepted of God, till he hath done this in order to it; *If thy Brother hath ought against thee, first reconcile thy self to thy Brother*, *Mat.* 5. 24. How can any Man think that God, who requires *Love to our*

Neighbour, doing good to him, and relieving of him, can be reconciled to *him*, who hath spent his time in *doing hurt* to his Neighbour, and never made any Restitution or Acknowledgment to him? It is strange that any man can be so deluded as to think that he can rob his Neighbour, and keep his Goods from him, and then have Forgiveness from God. This were to suppose that God proffers Mercy to Sinners without their regard to the Laws of Justice and Uprightness. There must be great ignorance in the Thief, or else it were impossible for him to think that God, who hath throughout the Scriptures declar'd his extream displeasure against all injustice and unrighteousness, the Old Testament strictly requiring Restitution from Thieves, *Exod.* 22. and other places, and giving an account of temporal Judgments for oppression or wrong done between man and man, as in *Amos c.* 4. and many other places: And the New Testament declaring, that the day of Judgment will be a day of Tryal of what Men have been to one another in the World; in which, God will cast them *into everlasting punishment*, that did not give to others; much more them that took away the Right of others, *Mat.* 25. I say, that if the Thief were not strangely ignorant, he could not think to expect Mercy from God, till he had done all that is in his power of Right to them whom he had wronged. If the Conscience of the Sinner were rightly sensible, it would fly in his face when he begs Mercy from God, and tell him, that he hath not sent word to this or that man, where his Goods are, and where he may have them again: He would think that he hears *GOD* say to him, *What hast thou done? the voice of thy Brother crieth unto me, whom thou hast injur'd; and canst thou expect Mercy from me, who dost refuse to do that which is right to thy Brother?* The Heathens have a truer Notion of God than these men. The *Ninevites* expected no mercy from God, till they *turned from the violence that was in*

their

their hands; the meaning of which is, according to the best, if not all Expositors, that they would not keep, but restore that which they had wrongfully taken away.

I will not enlarge upon this, having treated more at large upon it in another *Publication. If the Thief be a true penitent, he will send to them whom he hath wronged, using his utmost *endeavour* to help them to that which he hath taken from them: If he cannot do it, his grief will be the greater, and he will most heartily beg their Pardon and their Prayers. And this, I am sure, is the opinion of all Divines, of all Perswasions, founded upon the Holy Scriptures, and upon the highest Reason. I urge this the more, because I lately had some discourse with Malefactors in the Prison, who would not be convinced, that there is so much as Forgiveness to be asked from Men, whatever wrong have been done to them; alledging that which the Scribes spake when they cavill'd against our Saviour, *Who can forgive sins but God only? Mark* 2. 7. Not knowing or considering that in all Second-table sins forgiveness is to be had from Men, because there is injury done to them as well as to God; for otherwise, why should the Scripture speak so much of mens forgiving one another, and our Saviour direct us to pray, *Forgive us as we forgive others?* This Forgiveness is not expected where the person offending doth not at least acknowledge the offence, and declare his grief for it. *If thy Brother trespass against thee, if he repent, forgive him: And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, forgive him, Luk.* 17. 3, 4. As God requires forgiveness from the Person offended, so he requires, that the Person offending should repent (*i. e.* declare his sorrow) and ask forgiveness from him whom he hath injur'd; *If he turn unto thee, saying, I repent, forgive him.* I have heard Malefactors beg very loud of God to forgive them, but I have seldom heard any Lament

of Restitution.

ment that they have done so much Mischief to honest and innocent Persons. They think, and I have heard them say, that if they suffer for what they have done, it is a sufficient satisfaction to all whom they have robbed, and therefore they need not concern themselves any farther. Whereas on the contrary, it is only a satisfaction to the Law, and none to them who have suffer'd the wrong, but rather a grief and trouble. I may add that of all condemned Malefactors, I have perceived less appearance of Repentance in Thieves than in any other, unless it be just at the time of Execution. I had once occasion to observe a remarkable Penitent, who was condemned for *Coyning*: He spent his time in praying to God and using the most vehement and pathetic Ejaculations that ever *I* heard from any man; and the other Prisoners told me, that it was his practice day and night. But when *I* went in, and found *him* praying, *I* found the condemned Thieves sleeping; and being awak'd, they were still asleep, as to any impressions that I could make upon them. They were as Stocks and Stones in comparison of that poor Penitent; but when they came to their Execution, they cried to God for mercy, which probably was all that they ever intended.

3ly. Those that are true Penitents, are desirous to promote Piety and Justice in the World, and to suppress Sin and Wickedness; both for the honour of God and of Religion; and likewise for the good and welfare of Mankind.

If Thieves were Penitent, they would do what in them lies to suppress that wicked trade, which hath so dishonoured *God* and the Christian Religion, and hath taken away so many good mens Estates and bad mens Lives; they would particularly send to their Companions to beg of them to forsake their ways and turn to God. But where shall we find any such repentance in a Thief? *I* have great reason to say on the contrary from what *I* have heard in the Prison, that many of them

them wish good success to their Companions, and that their wicked trade may thrive when they are executed.

Thus *I* have given a brief Account of the Repentance of these poor wretches, how short it comes of that which is necessary for the Salvation of their Souls. *I* have no more reason to think that such a man's Crying to God for Mercy, meerly for fear of Hell, avails him any thing, than that God hears the Prayers of the *Wild Irish*, of whom it is said, that when they go out to rob, they pray to God that they may find a good Booty. *It* is a Repentance without Piety or Justice, which can signifie nothing. There is all *Fear* and no *Love* in it. *I* proceed to give *Advice to young persons*, for the *Prevention of Theft.*

1. Be careful to perform the Duties of Religion on the Lord's Day: it is commonly the first Complaint that Thieves make in the bitterness of their Souls, that they made the Lord's Day a day of *Vanity* and *Idleness*: From being at first only Sunday-walkers for their Pleasure, they became at length Night-walkers to their Destruction. Those that at first only turn their Backs upon the Church, and will not serve God in it, come thither at length to serve the Devil in it; *I* mean, to pick Pockets and rob those that are doing their Duties to God. God saith to the wicked Jews, *Jer.* 7. 9. *Will ye steal,* &c. *and stand before me in mine house?* But we have wicked wretches, who make God's House a place to steal *in*. Those that are careful to observe the Ordinances of God on that day, keep from such horrid wickedness.

2. Take heed of evil Principles and Opinions in matters of Religion. Thieves are often deluded with a Conceit that the Gallows is destin'd for them, and therefore it was unavoidable. *I* knew a poor wretched Creature in the Country, who being blam'd for his thieving, and admonish'd to live an honest and industrious Life, answer'd, That he alwaies thought it was ordained

that

that he ſhould be hang'd; and therefore continued his Practice till he was ſo indeed, and ſeem'd to have then ſome kind of Support from it.

And at the laſt Execution which I ſaw, there was a notorious Robber (who dyed of another Religion) whoſe condition I lamented, as he paſſed by me in the Priſon, and he told me, that he hoped he ſhould ſubmit with Patience, to that death which God had appointed for him. This is blaſphemouſly to ſuppoſe that God is the Author of *Wickedneſs*, and a cruel Enemy to his beloved Creature: it plainly ſhews the deluſion of the Devil.

3. Take heed of Apoſtatizing from the Beginings of a Religious Life: Early Obedience to God is the beſt Security of Happineſs both in this world, and that which is to come; and it is very rare, that thoſe who have been ſincerely careful to pleaſe God, do turn from it; and yet ſometimes it is ſo; and then ſuch perſons, forſaking God, do oft-times run into wicked and deſperate Courſes. Of this there was one inſtance ſome years ſince, of which I think fit to give as exact an Account as my Memory can retain, and in his own words, who was both a Thief and a Murderer.

I was (ſaid he) *when I was young, one that was well affected to the things of Religion: I was not only careful to frequent the publick Worſhip of God, but afraid to commit a ſecret Sin, or to omit a ſecret Duty: But the Diſputes that were about Religion made me doubt whether I was in the Right way; and not knowing where to ſerve God beſt, I grew remiſs and negligent. After that, I fell to Gaming; and having loſt Mony by it, I liſtened to thoſe that gave me wicked Counſel. After I came into the Priſon, for the ſpace of Fourteen days and nights I thought my ſelf in Hell, ſo great were the tortures of my Conſcience. I remembred almoſt every circumſtance relating to my former care to ſerve God: What Miniſters I heard, what Texts, and how the Sermons affected me; and concluded that ſuch an Apoſtate could never obtain Mercy from God. After thoſe Fourteen*

days

days were expired, my Despair began to abate, and then (which was about Four days before my Tryal) I spent my time day and night in crying to God to have mercy upon me, and was heard by him, for I found his Holy Spirit comforting of me with assurance of the Pardon of my Sin; And I bless God, the Sentence of Death was not terrible to me; and I question not, but I shall have Comfort at my Execution from the same God. An instance which shews how dangerous it is for young Persons not to persevere in the practice of Religion, and how infinitely merciful God is to those that are truly and sincerely penitent.

4. Take heed of Idleness. *Agurs* Prayer is, That God would not give him Poverty, lest (being poor) he steal, *Prov.* 30. 9. As some men are poor by the Providence of God, so others make themselves poor by their own slothfulness; which is an in-let to this Sin, that brings them to Destruction. God did not intend that Man should be idle in the state of innocency; nor are the glorified Beings idle in the state of Happiness. And the truth is, Man is a Creature to whom idleness is irksome, and therefore when wicked men will not be set to lawful Work, there's an Enemy that will employ them in that which is unlawful.

5. Be not fickle and unconstant, but fix to that employment, to which the Providence of God doth principally direct. Many men disliking their Trades and Educations, make tryals of that which they understand not, and that brings them to the trade of Stealing at last.

6. *Be frugal.* When young persons addict themselves to the gratifying of a profuse and lavish humour, it will be maintain'd, tho' it be by stealing Mony when their own is gone. They are Thieves to themselves in the first place; or, I may say, that *Lust* and *Pride* robs *them*, and then they rob others.

7. Take heed of small Beginnings in that which is unjust. Those Servants that give little things out of the Shop, which they know their Masters will not allow of, or out of the Kitchin, without the leave of their Mistris,

(which

(which none but idle and bad People will receive) come by degrees to more notorious Acts of wickedness: Every little unjust action weakens the defence of the mind, and breaks the bonds of uprightness and Justice.

The certain way for young-men to avoid this destructive Wickedness, is, to observe the Apostles Rule betimes, *to exercise themselves alwaies*, (wherever they are, seen or unseen) *to have a conscience void of offence both towards God and towards men*; and never to forget that Proverbial saying, which our Saviour makes use of, *Luk.* 16 10. *He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much.*

Now, the God of truth and Righteousness, who is the Judge of all the Earth, and cannot but *do right*; *and who will proceed in judgment according, to the rules of justice and uprightness*; *put his fear into the hearts of those that have done wrong, that they may not offer to him a mock-Repentance, but really turn from their wicked ways, doing that which is right: And into the Hearts of young persons, that they may never bring themselves to misery in this World, or eternal Torments in the next, but may live so as to be the beloved Disciples of our Lord and Saviour.* Amen.

Fortunae Cotton

FINIS.

Cotton